



THE LILY.

A stainless Spirit loved you in a far, remembered day—
O, pure, light-jeweled altar, where the winds kneel down to pray!
And o'er dead blooms and life-red blooms I hear that Spirit say:

"Consider ye the lilies—
All kings, all crowns above,
For greater than all kingdoms
Is the Litaney of Love!"

I sought the artist-weavers o'er many a land and sea;
They decked my love from looms of light,
all rich and radiantly,
But still the Spirit's voice thrilled through my glittering dreams to me:

"Consider ye the lilies—
The wealth of worlds above:
The only joy is loving—
The only wealth is Love!"

O, Lily of that lesson! In the wide world's dim Night!
Lead us where lives the Morning in ecstasy of Light!
Till Love shall kiss and crown us his own in Heaven's sight!

"Consider ye the lilies—
White dreams of Heaven above;
Great are the gifts of Heaven,
And the greatest still is Love!"
—F. L. Stanton, in Atlanta Constitution.

The Hermit

A Story of the Wilderness

By CHARLES CLARK MUNN
Author of "Pocket Island," "Uncle Terry" and "Rockhaven."

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CHAPTER XXXIV.—CONTINUED.

"Oh, you are not to be rid of me so easily," answered Angie, lightly, "and if you want to be, you can't, either. I wouldn't marry Martin or the best man that ever lived, and desert you now."

But Aunt Comfort only smiled again, serene in her faith of what must inevitably happen.

For a little while the two remained silent, each absorbed in her widely divergent line of reflection, while the tall clock ticked on, the evening breeze rustled the brown leaves about the house, and the fire burned low. At last Aunt Comfort, still smiling, began to doze, and Angie was alone with her thoughts.

And then back to the old days of her girlhood they sped in spite of all resolutions, and once again the old memories returned. They were only fond recollections now, for he who had inspired them had passed out of her life for good, and could not now be allowed admission again. He must never even know she retained them. Her path of duty was clear, and beside the good motherly soul who had been all in all to her so long—beside her and for her she must and would live until the patient hands were folded at last and the wrinkled face would smile no more.

It was a duty of love and gratitude, ten times stronger than all the silly impulses once inspired by Martin and now sought to be renewed by him. True he was manly and tender, and somehow, absent, now was nearer to her than when present. He had shown repentance for his old-time neglect which, after all, was not surprising; and had almost begged for tact and forgiveness and reinstatement in her favor. She recognized that to live alone and without a man's protection was not easy for any woman, and yet so she had resolved and for a reason that seemed sacred.

Then she fell to wondering what kept him so long in the wilderness and why it was that unique birch-bark letter, scrawled with a charred stick, had been sent in an envelope directed by some one else. She had opened it with eagerness, and tried again and again to decipher words impossible to read. It contained naught except what all might read without question, if they could, and yet no missive ever received by her had been valued more.

His movements and plans in life were not her concern, of course, and not likely to be. She had renounced him for good and all now, and if he returned and pleaded his love, as she imagined he might, it would avail not. Her resolve was made and final—and yet Martin absent was stronger than Martin present, and the old sweet illusion hard to eradicate.

There are turning points in life, when to choose the path of duty brings a heartache, and such a one now confronted Angie, yet she faltered not, and the gray head with its white cap and wrinkled face, now nodding just across the table, still seemed her shrine of duty.

And yet—and yet—
The fire had burned quite out—only one tiny coal still glowed among the white ashes, the tall clock kept saying, "Never—never—never," the night wind still rustled the dead leaves in the dooryard, and life to Angie seemed like the clock's solemn voice.

Suddenly Aunt Comfort woke up and looked at her companion.

"Why, Angie," she said, "you've been cryin'!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

A TROUBLED CONSCIENCE.

When Nezer saw the white-clad figure of David Curtis burst out of the house and vanish in the darkness with a yell of fear, his ingrained love of mischief received a keen but momentary satisfaction, followed by a sudden dread of consequences, and instead of continuing his ghost parade down the street, he sneaked away over

the hills and hid his Scar Face disguise. Then he began to have troubled dreams and saw himself bound hand and foot and carried to Riverton, where the courthouse and jail were, then locked in a narrow cell, and twice he dreamed that he was standing on a scaffold with a noose about his neck. He began to grow thin and haggard, and as Aunt Comfort would call it, "woefully peaked."

And now ensued a most ludicrous game of cross-purposes, for there wasn't an ache or pain suggested by Aunt Comfort that he didn't have. The comedy was of short duration, however, for the chance to dose some one was consolation to Aunt Comfort, and she acted promptly.

"Stick out your tongue," she said to Nezer, and a red and healthy specimen shot out of his face.

"Nothin' the matter with yer stummick ez I kin see," she ejaculated, feeling of his hands, "n' no signs o' fever. You say your head aches, 'n' back, 'n' legs, 'n' you sartainly ain't eatin' nat'rally. Do ye hev cold chills up 'n' down yer spine?"

"Yessum," responded Nezer, eagerly. "Feel dizzy?"

"All the time."

"Sick to yer stummick?"

"Yessum."

"Bad dreams, you say?"

"Yessum."

"Well, yer gittin' bilyus," returned Aunt Comfort, wiping her "specs" from her apron, adjusting them and pulling one of the invalid's eyelids down.

"Let's see your tongue agin."

For a moment she scanned it, and then added, "You want a good dose of thorough-wort 'n' I guess I'll begin with lobelia," and she started for the attic.

"It's curus," she observed to Angie, after Nezer had swallowed his dose of lobelia tea without a murmur and hastened out of the kitchen, "I never saw that boy so willin' ter take medicine afore, 'n' yet he ain't got no signs, 'ceptin' loss o' appetite 'n' a little yellin' round the eyes. Must be suthin' comin' on, though."

If there was, she took prompt, vigorous methods to head it off, however, and gave Nezer no rest.

At first he had dreaded discovery and dreamed of hanging, but inside of two days, a persistent course of thoroughwort, catnip, opodeldoc and lobelia, again varied by hot applications of burdock leaves and pepper tea, had made prison seem a blessed escape from trouble, and vinegar taste sweet.

By this time Nezer was sick in earnest, and Aunt Comfort, somewhat scared, sent for Dr. Sol. He examined him, and after Aunt Comfort had recounted the remedies she had tried, he laughed.

"You've both had a good time, I guess," he said, "and the boy won't soon forget it, but there's nothing the matter with him."

Aunt Comfort was not convinced, however, and though Nezer began to eat again, she watched him continuously for more symptoms, and his dread returned.

For some years it had been Angie's custom to devote a few Saturday afternoons to out-door excursions, usually taking Nezer along for company and protection. In spring they went after arbutus, cowslips, water-cress, and later for strawberries and other summer fruits. In autumn, when the woods were brown and golden, nut-gathering was the incentive, and then Nezer was indispensable. They had been out twice since Martin had gone away, and now when Saturday came again, she took Nezer and started once more, and never was the boy more grateful for the chance. To him—in spite of his mischievous nature—Angie was the one person whom he most adored—almost a goddess, at whose shrine he worshipped. He had by this time become so reduced in spirits—thanks to "arbs"—that he felt the absolute need of making some one his confidante. He had, in fact, kept his awful secret as long as possible, and to no one but Angie would he or could he dare confess it. Like the young Indian he was, however, he always approached all things by circuitous routes, and when they were well away from the village this autumn afternoon, and while poking away the rustling leaves in search of nuts, he began.

"Do you s'pose 'twas a ghost as scared old David the night he runned away?" he asked.

"Why, no," answered Angie, curious at once, and knowing Nezer never asked a question without an object, "there are no such things as ghosts."

"Wus it Amzi come back 'n' peekin' in, do ye think?"

"No, that isn't possible," came the sober answer.

"Wus it 'n' Injun, do ye s'pose?"

"There are no Indians about here," responded Angie, with aroused suspicions, and looking sharply at Nezer.

"It might have been a bad boy, I know, dressed up as an Indian. Who do you think it was?"

Nezer, kneeling on the ground, looked furtively up at Angie, and then suddenly became absorbed in his search for nuts.

"I dunno who 'twas," he said, "thout 'twas a ghost. Folks say 'twas, 'n' the mill is haunted; I wouldn't go thar arter dark, would you?"

Angie, knowing Nezer full well, made no response, feeling sure some admission would follow if she waited. For a few moments he pawed away at the rustling leaves, and then looked up at Angie again.

"Say, Angie," he said, "won't ye never tell nobody if I tell ye suthin'?"

"No, Nezer," she answered seriously. "Hope ter die."

"Hope to die."

"Hope the buggers 'll carry ye off if ye do."

"Hope they will."

Then Nezer, having thus sealed her lips, arose.

"Come with me," he said, "n' I'll show

you suthin'," and he led the way into the woods.

For a quarter mile Angie followed him into the forest, until a dark thicket of hemlocks, choked with boulders, was entered, and here he dropped prone to earth beside one, and reaching into a crevasse beneath it, drew forth a bundle, and, undoing it, held up the hideous mask and head-dress of "Scar Face."

"And so you are responsible for this awful happening," she said, as sternly as she could. "Now I know what has ailed you for a week, and I am glad Auntie gave you lobelia; you deserved worse medicine."

"I s'pose they'd put me in jail if 'twas found out," he said, as he hid the mask again, and led the way out of the woods. "You don't think they'd hang me, do ye, Angie?"

This time Angie had to laugh. "Now tell me all about it, Nezer," she said. "I've promised to keep your secret, and I will." And when the border of the woods was reached, she sat on the leaf-carpeted ground and listened for an hour to Nezer's recital of his exploit.

And of the two, it is certain he enjoyed the telling the more. "It was an awful thing to do, Nezer," Angie asserted when the tale was told, "and I'm glad it isn't on my conscience. If you don't quit moping around the way you have, however, and act natural, all Greenvale will guess your secret before long."

But Nezer was cured already, and when the lowering sun had started them homeward, he was almost hilarious in his joy. On their way they passed Martin's fish-pond, and here a



surprise awaited Angie, for the long, narrow lakelet lay smiling and gently rippled in the autumn breeze, a thin sheet of water poured over the well-built dam, and beside the pond, and sheltered by a tree-crowned hillock, stood a tiny cottage with wide veranda.

"It's fer old Cy," explained Nezer, with almost the delight of possession. "Hisn's so old an' tumble-down, Martin built this fer him ter watch the pond. so us boys wouldn't be ketchin' the trout. I wouldn't," he added, with astonishing frankness, "fer I ketched more'n 200 on 'em ter put in, 'n' got ten cents apiece."

It was evident Martin had won Nezer's heart, and as Angie peeped into the pretty cottage, with its two rooms below and open fireplace in the front one, and thought what a palace it would seem to old Cy after his present hovel, somehow her heart felt heavy. He who had built this, out of kindly feeling for old Cy, was once her girlish lover, and would be now again if she so willed.

But it must not be—her resolution was made—her duty plain, and to be followed at all cost to herself or him.

Only a few moments she looked at this labor of love for an almost out-cast old man, and then turned away in silence. Over the hills toward the village she led the way, pausing a moment at the bush-grown graveyard to place a wreath of ground-pine on a sunken mound marked by a low, white stone inscribed "Mother," and then kept on.

And Nezer, following close, and feeling it would be a privilege to kneel and kiss the hem of her calico dress, wondered why her face was sad, and she so silent.

"There is no need to dose Nezer any more," she said to Aunt Comfort that night, "I've found out what ails him! It's a troubled conscience."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A NEW LIFE.

Martin's feelings, when he began the last day's journey to reach Greenvale again, were about equally divided between dread and anticipation. He had solved the mystery of Amzi's disappearance—a bit of news sure to astonish Greenvale, but of doubtful effect on Angie's peace of mind. He was now in a position to secure justice for her, if she would permit such action, and yet he dreaded to draw the veil aside and tell her what he must. Of his own hopes, and the chance to pose as a benefactor, he gave no thought. His one and only real anticipation was the power he now held with certified facts to compel the contemptible David Curtis to an act of reparation. It was short-lived, for as Martin, the better to enjoy the scenery and learn the latest news from Greenvale, rode away with the driver, on his seat, that worthy waited not to be asked what it was.

"I s'pose," he said, "ye hain't heard how old Dave Curtis was found dead up in Mizzy swamp, hev ye?"

"Good Lord, is that so?" gasped the astonished Martin.

"Wal, 'tis fer a fact," came the answer, in a tone that showed how David stood in the driver's estimation. "He wus took with another 'fit the night o' Hallowe'en, and lit out with notin' but his shirt on. We found the cuss up in Mizzy swamp three days arter, stone dead, 'n' stark naked. He was middlin' well done up, too, by briers 'n' fallin' over rocks, we called,

but thar wa'n't no tears shed on that account 'n' no mournin' when we planted him, as fur as I kin jarn. The mills is both shut down now, 'n' Angie gits all the property, I s'pose."

"But what drove him out that night," responded Martin, having Nezer in mind; "did he see another ghost?"

"Wal, he callate he did, 'n' that's what must hev skeered him. Thar's been curus things goin' on 'bout his premises the last three months, 'n' a good many b'lieve they're haunted by Amzi's ghost. It's my private 'pinion though, that old Dave's conscience had been worryin' him lately since you come back. I've heard," he continued, glancing at Martin, and anxious for information, "that you've bought the Mizzy property and was like to begin legal proceedings fer Angie; leastwise that's the story."

Martin smiled at this truly Yankee method of obtaining news.

"I did obtain an option on the property," he responded. "But as for bringin' any legal action, I've never said I should. I was willing to buy the Mizzy power and land, however, and pay David's price."

"Wal, mebbe that won't be necessary now," with another inquisitive glance; "they're all comin' to Angie now, 'n' 'n', we all callate it'll be plain sailin' now fur you."

But Martin made no response to this decidedly pointed assertion, and little did that Yankee stage driver realize how far away from "plain sailing" Martin's future course seemed to him. He had returned to Greenvale prepared to astonish the natives, confound David Curtis, and save Angie her heritage, only to find that the Great Reaper had robbed him of his opportunity. For David, he felt not one grain of pity or regret, and as for Angie, his first thought was—was it now wisest or best to disclose the fact of her father's existence at all? It was but momentary, for come what might, it was Martin's fixed faith that all concealments would prove unwise in the end. His first plan had been to go to Angie as soon as possible after he arrived, and tell her all. She, first and foremost, should hear it. He dreaded the telling, however, for many reasons. Then its result on Angie's peace of mind and future was an all-important matter, and his own hopes as well.

For half the slow journey to Greenvale, Martin listened to the driver's repetition of all the gruesome facts of David's fate, including the gossip that followed it, with interest, and then, more absorbed in his own vexations, paid scant heed until the doctor's home was reached.

A cordial welcome here and a good supper restored him somewhat, and after an hour of patient listening to the doctor's version of the all-important news, and still retaining his own, he rose and declared his intention of calling upon Angie.

"Oh, by all means," laughed the doctor, "and I wish you success. If you didn't pop the question before you left, you ought to to-night, and matters between you must be settled soon, as I need your advice regarding her estate. I am appointed administrator and have awaited your return before doing anything."

It was a pleasant send-off, but a proposal of marriage was farthest from Martin's thoughts just now.

It was late when he reached Aunt Comfort's, and she and Angie, always awaiting each other's wish to retire, were alone in the sitting room. The evening, a typical November one, was chilly, the stars obscured, and a cold wind rustled the brown leaves about the ancient dwelling. Angie, too, was in much the same mood as the night, and for many reasons that need not be specified, and the slow-ticking clock and low-burning fire, merely accented her feelings. Life had for many years been without much color for her, and lately, less so than ever.

And then came a knock, and he who had been absent for two long months, but oft present in her thoughts, met her when she opened the door.

His greeting, also, seemed unduly constrained and formal, and after shaking hands with Aunt Comfort, and inquiring after her health, he drew his chair to the fire and a pause came.

It is always a problem how either good or bad news can best be conveyed to its recipient, and poor Martin, after many days of worriment and dread, was now facing such. And the one person in all the world now dearest to his heart was the one most interested. For a few moments he watched the smouldering fire, the two ladies growing more curious each instant, and then he turned to them.

"You must pardon my abstraction," he said, "but I've only just arrived, and have brought you some strange news that will seem incredible, and I hardly know how to tell it. The stage driver has told me all that has happened here, but you two are first to be told what I have learned."

He paused a moment, looking first at Aunt Comfort, now wide eyed with astonishment, then at Angie, even more so, and then continued:

"It's not bad news I bring you, and yet not as good as I could wish. You remember the old hermit I told you about, Angie; well, he is—he is still there and quite content and happy, and improving some. In fact, I found him more rational, and I left old Cy to care for him this winter. It was fixing up his cabin that has kept me so long in the woods."

Once more Martin paused, for the dread secret wouldn't out, and a look of almost terror had come to Angie.

"He is all right," continued poor Martin again, conscious he was floundering, and feeling his throat growing husky, "and was—and was glad to hear from us all, and—and to see your picture."

And now ensued a dramatic scene, for Angie was on her feet instantly, with hands clasped and eyes dilated.

"What do you mean—who is he?" she almost screamed.

[To Be Continued.]

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